DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 158 437 EA 010 868

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TITLE The Blindly Practical and the Impractically Ideal: Pitfalls for the Unwary in the Specification of Educational Directions.
PUB DATE Jun 78
NOTE 40p.; Paper presented at the Canadian School Trustees' Association Congress on Education (1st, Toronto, Ontario, June 17-21, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Decision Making; Educational Objectives; Educational Philosophy; *Educational Planning; Values

ABSTRACT

The rapidity and complexity of current change create a paradoxical need for educational decision-making that is at the same time rapid and well thought out. A fundamental obstruction to genuinely effective educational planning is a misconceived notion of "practicality." The essence of the misconception is the belief that change in education should proceed without consideration of overall educational ideals. Such ideals are regarded by some practical decision-makers as vague, impossible to attain, and, sometimes, patently absurd. Yet all decision-making is in fact based on underlying assumptions or ideals, whether conscious or subconscious. Even such down-to-earth objectives as "teaching the basics" rest on ideals and assumptions concerning the ultimate purpose of life. Thus, ideals cannot be omitted from decision-making but are often misunderstood or ignored. Decision-making without consideration of underlying ideals is "blindly practical." Yet those who fanatically embrace ideals without gaining illumination of specific practice are "impractically ideal." The more difficult yet best approach to educational decision-making is one of "ideal practicality." In this approach, ideals are invoked with a clear indication of importance to the quality of life and the aims of schooling. This approach ensures that changes will be far-reaching and of long duration since they relate to fundamental concerns and urgent problems. (Author/JM)

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THE BLINDLY PRACTICAL AND THE IMPRACTICALLY IDEAL:

PITFALLS FOR THE UNWARY IN THE SPECIFICATION OF EDUCATIONAL DIRECTIONS

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June, 1978
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CONTENTS

A. Introduction

B. The Problem with High Ideals

(i) Vagueness and the Failure to Direct
(ii) Vagueness and Manipulation of Persons
(iii) Dewey, Peters, Krishnamurti, Bremer: Beware Far-Flung Ideals
(iv) High Ideals: The Impossibility of Their Attainment
(v) No Unique Direction for Schooling from High Ideals
(vi) The Patent Absurdity of Some Ideals

C. Ideals: Inevitability of Their Influence

(i) The Impossibility of Avoiding Ideals
(ii) An Objection: Terminating Aims Do Not Involve High Ideals

D. High Ideals Reinstated

(i) The Ambiguity is not Hopeless
(ii) Incompatibility of Aim and Mode of Achievement
(iii) Avoiding Manipulation by Vagueness
(iv) Reconsideration of Dewey, Peters, Krishnamurti and Bremer
(v) Impossibility of Attainment as the Strength of Ideals
(vi) Aims Designating the Unique Purpose of Schooling
(vii) What Looks Absurd May Not Be So
(viii) Ideals: From Toil to Play

E. Conclusion

F. References

A. Introduction

My paper deals with a number of conceptual problems which confront those in education with an unprecedented urgency. The urgency arises from the rapidity and complexity of change in every area of life: where there is stability, most action tends towards the habitual. We are not in an age of stability, and thus the almost continual demand for *freshly* considered action places a tremendous and unusual strain upon us. We find ourselves in a dangerously paradoxical situation: on the one hand, the novelty of problems demands an exercise of careful thought, so that action shall be intelligent. On the other hand, the rapidity with which we are faced with such problems, creating a demand for something approaching *instant* action, cancels the possibility of time for adequate thought. Add to this the 'knowledge-explosion', and the paradox becomes paralysing, for the sheer wealth of data requires anyone taking thought, to take longer over it than ever before!

In the face of this paradox, I see a number of alternatives being utilized, each of which is a mistake. a) Some throw up their hands and leave it to the so-called experts. This is a mistake I shall touch upon again. We need our experts, but we must not *leave* decision-making to them. b) Others, similarly bewildered and exhausted, sink back into time-honored, if not especially honorable, practices, for these at least, being habitual, do not place unrealistic demands on creative energy and knowledge. Unfortunately, they are often wrong, sometimes disastrously so. As the Worth Report states: "Our institutions for schooling are being left stranded in obsolescence and functioning more from habit

than conviction". c) And yet others, contemptuous of the shortcomings of experts (whose narrow specialism has blundered in the vast connectedness of things with the clarity of a sea captain using an inverted telescope) have taken it upon themselves to act creatively, but without adequate understanding. A good result here is either chance or divine providence, and it looks to me as if either can be extremely unwilling to co-operate.

"As we think, we live", says Alfred North Whitehead in "Historical Changes". What is the character of our thinking which leads us to make these and all the other consistantly wrong moves in educational decision-making, especially where our large scale goals (aims, objectives, ends, ideals) are concerned? I think one important area of mistaken thinking involves the concepts of ideality and of practicality, and of their relation. It is my belief that clearer thinking here could have considerable impact on the efficacy of educational change at all levels. I would like to share here some of the thoughts of a general nature I have had on this topic, in my own endeavour to be clear in what I am doing in education.

B. The Problem with High Ideals

I agree with Whitehead that "people are shy of ideals" - that is my experience. When the compilers of the Hall-Dennis report write, "the underlying aim of 'education' is to further man's unending search for truth", you can see the smirk and the irritation of the "practical" man. People *are* shy of ideals, and that is the problem - for I know of no significant way to be practical without a serious consideration of high ideals. It is a prevailing fallacy that either you are a practical man, and get things done, or you are an idealist, and get nothing done. What we have here is a concept of practicality which involves a rejection of high ideals.

It is rare to find something which has near universal agreement to be entirely without foundation. In this case, I think there are good reasons to be shy of ideals, but not to reject their consideration. What *are* some of the problems with high ideals which *this* sort of 'practical' educator may at one time or another have in mind? I shall attempt to capture as faithfully as possible my impressions of some of his thoughts on this topic.

(i) Vagueness and the Failure to Direct

High ideals are enormously vague. After all, what *does* the "furtherance of the unending search for truth" *mean*? Does it mean something obvious and trivial, namely that we don't want to be any more confused over important things than we need be? That sounds trivial because no one would want to disagree about *that*. The crucial question is: how are we supposed to realize that aim on Monday morning with some children

who can't speak the language of instruction, with workmen's drills pounding outside, with too many students per teacher and parents crying for something other than the accepted curriculum?

Or does this search after truth mean something rather special like a metaphysical or religious quest after a vision of the foundations of the universe? If it does, is it sensible to expect the school teacher, with all his or her abilities, to know how to do that? Is it likely that a great many will even believe it possible? Is it going to do anything about the literacy problem, the employment problem and all the other ground-level problems facing the student? Maybe, but it doesn't *look* likely.

Perhaps the search for truth means something else. But what, pray? Please tell us what in the world we are supposed to understand by this overall aim, this high ideal, as an acceptable signpost for educational planning?

It isn't difficult to see that precisely the same problem of vagueness holds with all very general aims. For example, the Alberta Worth Report has among its basic aims the encouragement of the fullest possible development of individual capabilities. But what capabilities? Artistic? Intellectual? Creative? Destructive? Only the 'socially-acceptable' ones? Or what? And what does it mean to develop them to the "fullest extent"? How can you tell whether this is achieved, or in process of being achieved with human capacities? When is an intelligence *fully* developed? And if it does mean something, how do you implement it? Is it realistic to even think of implementing such an aim?

If the vagueness of the statement of overall or basic aims is resolved into some useful specificity, is it possible to show that,

considering the many alternative and conflicting meanings, and to do so in a way which is not arbitrary?

It seems clear to me that the vagueness of high ideals *does* present great problems if they are to be *seriously* considered, so as to give any definite direction to practice.

(ii) Vagueness and Manipulation of Persons

If the statements of high ideals are *not* seriously considered - that is, they are just used as vote-catching slogans - their vagueness is a very different problem. To a parent concerned about an illiterate child, the promise of a would-be school board trustee to promote literacy sounds very attractive. But then, when elected, he or she leaves everything pretty much as it was, the child's class and school carry on as normal. Or strange new practices, which appear unacceptable, are introduced, with a network of dubious and perplexing arguments as to why the promotion of literacy requires them. For if you *keep* your statements of aims sufficiently vague, you can appear to justify almost any practice you like. Racial, political, sexual and other types of prejudice easily and quietly take effect under such a smoke screen and faith in the importance of ideals wanes.

(iii) Dewey, Peters, Krishnamurti, Bremer: Beware Far-Flung Ideals

Some of those in university circles, who have a direct effect on teachers and educational administrators during their professional preparation, come under the more subtle influence of philosophers who claim that high ideals are dangerous to educators. Dewey, Peters and Krishnamurti are names that spring to mind.

Dewey claims that because of the temporal continuity of experience, any aim *imposed* onto the student's growth process cannot have

meaning for him. Meaning in the form of purposes, aims, ends or ideals arises *within* the flux of individual experience. And since he maintains that intelligence cannot develop in relation to objects which are meaningless, education cannot and must not be shackled by external ideals.

Peters is in essential agreement with this conclusion. He insists that the ideals which count in education are not far-off ends to be prepared for and reached. They are the principles, ethical and otherwise, which act as criteria for evaluating and specifying the *present* worth of educational practice. Don't tell me where you claim to be going, says Peters. Tell me what you want to do to or with the student now. Then I'll tell you whether I think it is good, trivial, or dehumanizing, and why.

Krishnamurti holds that dealing with other people in terms of some far-flung ideal allows you to see of them only what does or does not fit the dimensions of your ideal. Thus you are effectively blinded by the ideal to most of what the person *really is*, in terms of needs and potentialities. So you cannot possibly assist that person's education, and you are bound to obstruct it.

Bremer gives a warning similar to this. He compares two concepts of rational conduct in education. According to one, you set a goal and head for it resolutely, no matter what. This is, in fact, a mode of blindness, and the more appealing the goal, the more prone we are to this mode. According to the other concept - the true rationality - you keep re-assessing the goal in the light of new circumstances and your own development. In *this* sense it is implied that educational goals must not be taken *over-seriously*.

These are not, I submit, arguments which can be rejected lightly.

(iv) High Ideals: The Impossibility of Their Attainment

On the face of it would seem that an extremely frustrating aspect of high educational ideals is the impossibility of reaching them. Consider again the search for truth. It is as old as man, and those who have taken it furthest assure us that our knowledge is like one star in a vast blackness of ignorance. And when do you obtain your fullest realization of personal potentials? Never, I imagine. How much less nebulous and more satisfying to have terminating aims like competence in the basic literacy skills. Either you can read and write competently in relation to social requirement, or you cannot. This is something an educator can get his teeth into, a parent can judge for himself, and education ministers can convert to convenient statistical form. There too, we see the attraction of the movement towards specific 'competency' teaching and evaluation at every level of education.

(v) No Unique Direction for Schooling from High Ideals

Alberta's recent "Harder" Report explicitly denies that the very general ideals relevant to the total education of the person considered as a whole are any special business of school educators. The home, the peer groups, and the social agencies share in realizing them. The special business of organized education in *schools*, it is maintained, is the promotion of highly specialized knowledge and skills whose attainment is measurable and directly relevant to basic functioning in the contemporary culture. The education of the total person in the light of highly abstract and unmeasurable ideals is *contributed to* by schools, but is not their *unique* concern. In terms of time and resources, this is considered to be the obvious common sense of practical realism.

(vi) The Patent Absurdity of Some Ideals

The patent absurdity of some proposed overall aims would seem to bar any serious consideration of them at all. For example, are we to follow Leonard and pursue "ecstasy" as a basic educational goal as the cold war becomes hotter, as food diminishes against a ballooning population, and as the grumbling of the unemployed amplifies to riot pitch? Is this not another tune in and drop out exhortation?

That so many educators at every level have long since washed their hands of 'idealism' and opted for 'practicality' is clearly understandable. However, although it is not nearly so clear, it is none the less true, I shall maintain, that in opting for the various forms of *this* 'practicality' they have in fact not simply washed their hands of vague and endless talk about high ideals - they have washed their hands of any hope of effective educational planning - the very thing they wanted to achieve! As a first step in demonstrating this, I shall consider briefly some of the forms this ideal-rejecting practicality takes, and the reasons why they became *im*practical. As a second step, I shall suggest ways in which the problems with high ideals may be avoided so as to render the ideals practically effective.

C. Ideals: Inevitability of Their Influence

(i) The Impossibility of Avoiding Ideals

It is not possible to function without ideals, either as directive or as implied. Once that is realized we can give up the notion that we have any choice in the matter. As purposeful beings, our direction is provided by our ideals, at whatever level of conscious recognition they may be. What then *is* happening when someone decides that he or she will be 'practical' by *excluding* high ideals, and believes that he or she succeeded? I contend that what has been given up is *thought about* ideals, not the ideals themselves. The ideals themselves continue to have directive effect at a subconscious level. Now in itself there is nothing startling about this. We could not function in ordinary life for a moment without the ability to acquire principles acritically by 'cultural osmosis' and to keep most of them operating at a subconscious level. The problem is that, in the case we are examining, ideals assimilated from the culture acritically remain uncriticized as long as there is no *effort* to bring them into the purview of critical consciousness. If they are false ideals, or are badly misunderstood, they misdirect and confuse activity. Under these conditions, our alleged 'practicality' becomes, as Lord Beaconsfield apparently said, the sort that commits all the errors of our forefathers.

For some it is hard to believe at first that they are motivated by extremely abstract ideals which they have never, so far as they can remember, even considered. But there are simple techniques which I use to unearth these hidden assumptions, and those who are interested in

participating are not a little surprised at some of the deeper guiding ideas which they themselves manage to identify.

So here are our choices: either we can refuse to consider educational ideals, and be controlled by them in their uncriticized and often badly muddled forms, or we can start the process of trying to identify, sort, refine, reject, and embellish them until we have a clear grasp of what they are doing to us and what we are doing with them.

But the inevitability of the intrusion of ideals is *double* barrelled. For in addition to subconsciously intended ideals, ideals are involved *by implication* in practices we adopt on the uncriticized assumption that in some sense or another they are beneficial. And when the implied ideals are teased out, the recognition of them can be quite a shock. For example, it is common for teachers at all levels to assume that students must absorb, by listening and reading, tremendous amounts of information before they can undertake a significant enquiry. In fact this so-called preparation dulls the capacity for enquiry. So whatever their intended aims, their *implied* aim is to dull the student's capacity for enquiry.

Now, returning to subconsciously embraced ideals, I want to emphasize that when they are here, functioning at whatever level of awareness, their function is *directive*. They settle our minds, wrongly or rightly, about what is and is not an *educational* activity. Obviously this is indispensable; without it we would not be able to distinguish growing potatoes from teaching. This means that if we have the right ideals, understood with great clarity in their far-reaching implications, we have the best possible chance of generating activities and changes which *will* be truly educative. On the other hand, if our ideals

are muddled for lack of critical thought, we are in the best possible position to blunder into non- or anti-educational activities and changes, all the while convinced we are clear-headed, practical educators and administrators, unbefuddled by any idealism.

The question is now: if we have no choice as *responsible* educators but to give careful attention to our ideals, how do we get around the problems listed earlier? For if they are immovable barriers, then we find ourselves locked into a contradiction from which any step will be irrational. That is, to get educational direction, we have to look to the big ideals. And yet it has already been shown that handling such ideals is fraught with all kinds of problems which cancel their effectiveness--vagueness, potential for subtle manipulation, and so forth.

(ii) An Objection: Terminating Aims Do Not Involve High Ideals

At this point an obvious objection might be made. If we adopt, as many have, a very pragmatic aim like "back to the basics", do we not have obvious and sensible educational direction without at all invoking nebulous ideals? My reply would be this: firstly, the ideal of "back to the basics" is itself extremely 'nebulous' in the sense of being vague, ambiguous. After all, did we ever *leave* the "basics"? If the alternatives are said to be "progressive" education, or education of the "total" person, I think it very doubtful if, apart from a few isolated pockets of experimentation, we have *yet* left "the basics" in North America. But, is it true that Deweyan progressives, free-schoolers, 'total' educators, and other alternative educators are not concerned with "the basics"? If the "basics" are reading, writing and arithmetic, then the alternative schools have been concerned with them all along. The

argument has not been over *aim*, but methodology. (The confusion of a difference in aim with a difference in method is common.) Likewise, for the diversity of programming in ordinary public schooling. It is not an alternative to "the basics"; it provides, in principle, channels of interest for the *application* of "basic" knowledge.

Why, however, should we accept that knowledge of the 3 R's is *basic*? Basic to life? Of course not. Basic to communication in contemporary North America? In spite of McLuhan, I am sure they *are* going to continue to play an important role in communication. But not *basic*, surely. After all, speaking is more basic. As the Plowden Report rightly points out, "communication by the spoken word is at least as important as writing and, for the majority, perhaps more important". A good case can be made for the contention that a great deal of failure in literacy in spite of schooling is due to the fact that reading and writing are imposed before an adequate basis of skill in communication through the spoken word has been developed. Personally, I have my doubts about speech as most basic, for knowledge - of communication skills or the production of nerve gas - can be used in a number of ways, not all of them beneficial. So we are down to ethical sensitivity. Can knowledge in this dimension seriously be said to be less basic than S and the 3 R's? Only at our peril I would think - as the present situation evidences.

There is another problem I see. Let us suppose that we are agreed that as educators we shall adopt the cultivation of S and 3 R's as an indispensable aim. Now, let us imagine that a critic of our schooling systems asks us seriously why we regard this ideal as an aim for organized education. Are we just going to reply that it is obvious? That will not do at all. Some of the most disastrous mistakes in history

seemed, quite obviously, the best policy at the time. So we have to reply. S and the 3 R's are essential to communication in contemporary society. Communication is essential to every facet of life. Therefore, S and the 3 R's are essential to every facet of contemporary life. Q.E.D. Not good enough, says our irritating critic. The home, the peer group, and so on, all play a very large part in developing the ability to communicate well, so how can that be a uniquely designating aim for *school*? And anyway, he continues, you seem to be assuming now that it is 'just obvious' that the aim of organized education must be to provide for something that is *essential* to life. So again, why S and the 3 R's? For schools cannot provide for everything essential to life. If they did, they would be all of life itself. At this point, we see what we are after, and reply triumphantly that the S and 3 R's part of communication development is the responsibility of schools, since to be made really effective it requires professional expertise in the form of trained teachers. Now in spite of the poor success rate of schools in promoting significant literacy, I think it would be fair to concede the point about the *aim*, and simply add that it is the correct methodology teachers lack as yet.

I will leave you to imagine how the dialogue must continue, for I at this stage want to draw attention to something interesting that happened. In addition to the fact that the phrase 'back to the basics' is desperately ambiguous, there is the point that to justify so-called "basics" as the special aim of schooling, we had to refer to a far more general ideal. It was something like this: the aim of organized education is to provide special opportunity for developing abilities without which our quality of life would be unthinkably impoverished. Now I submit that *that* statement

is as vague and critically ambiguous as any of those attacked earlier. Does this mean we must abandon the ideal of teaching the "basics" because it is subservient to the class of nebulous ideals which evaporate as soon as you blow on them? Whatever happens to it, it must be affected by the problems of the class of ideals of high generality; that, I think, is undeniable. For the moment, however, simply savour the fact that the terminating aim of returning to the "basics" is *not* self-justifying. It gains its credibility by reference beyond itself to at least one of the class of what I have called 'high' ideals. It is *not*, therefore, pragmatically exempt from the consideration of high ideals as some have thought. (Exactly the same holds for the appeal to highly specific "competencies" and "behavioural objectives".) The earlier objection collapses, and we return to the question of whether or not the inevitable ideals can be persuaded to be our allies. That is, the question of how, if at all, we can be significantly practical *with* high ideals.

D. High Ideals Reinstated

(i) The Ambiguity Is Not Hopeless

First, reconsider the frustrating vagueness of very general aims. Can it be rendered so as to permit practical decisions in the light of it? As an illustrative case, let us take again the Hall-Dennis report's specification of the overall aim of education: "to further man's unending search for truth." It is quite *hopelessly* ambiguous? I think not. See how the opposite sounds: to *prevent* man's unending search for truth". Immediately we see that this implies the support of a school system designed by an elite party for the purpose of controlling the populace through ignorance. That, to my way of thinking, is disastrous, and I suspect it is closer to home than we usually suppose. What this reversal of the aim statement reveals, then, is that its vagueness is not *hopeless* vagueness. There is clearly a definite meaning of the highest importance contained somewhere in these words.

There is, for example, the intimate connection of *freedom* with the possession of truth; if someone else has a truth and you haven't, they can manipulate you. And there is the intimate connection of truth and freedom with the *quality* of experience. There is the fact that life is relationships - relationships with individuals, between small groups, inter-nationally, and so on. Truth is indispensable if each relationship is to rise frequently above suspicion, oppression, possession, and aggression.

(ii) Incompatibility of Aim and Mode of Achievement

All this is true, and fundamentally so, but being literally as old as the hills, it does still have the stupefying ring of the cliché about it. We must do more than this. Is the ideal worth asserting

because our efforts to promote the individual grasp of important truths are meeting with considerable failure? The discussion on this point is long, but I suspect the answer comes out as a clear positive If so, our aim statement is no mere cliché ; it embodies a serious indictment of present school systems within an allegedly *democratic* political regime.

Assuming for the moment that I am right about this, how is it that we can so easily subscribe to such a basic ideal and yet be so unsuccessful in realizing it? We are now at the problem of vagueness for practical implementation. It is entirely possible to initiate schooling activities and changes which are *intended* to nurture the individual's capacity to discern the true from the false, but which *actually* achieve the exact opposite. For the statement that we wish to further the search for truth does not *itself* specify the correct procedural principles and activities required. So part of the meaning vagueness has to be resolved by specifying *how* we intend to realize the aim.

In this case, I would say that the chief reason that our standard schooling practices so often *prevent* the realization of the aim to which they subscribe - that of furthering truth - is the pervading, fallacious belief that truth, or knowledge, can be transmitted and received. Under this assumption, our school practice at all levels is dominated by telling, correcting, advising, lecturing, informing. Now under the correct auxiliary conditions which I would say presently hold, these modes of activity are guaranteed to prevent the growth of the student's capacity for discerning truth, or, acquiring knowledge.

(iii) Avoiding Manipulation by Vagueness

The discussion makes another point indirectly. If the parent and student are not to be manipulated by teachers and principals, if teachers and principals are not to be manipulated by school board officials, and so on, the questioning of the meaning and mode of implementation of ideals defining policy *must* be an accepted practice. Moreover, those affected by policy must *insist* on receiving sufficient clarification. In other words, we introduce open dialogue as required - policy making is not *for*, it is *with*. I see no other way for the vagueness of ideals statements to avoid becoming manipulative, by intent or otherwise. The people at the various levels of the hierarchy in school systems may be in some sense experts in their field (though doubt is thrown on that by the "Peter" principle), but when experts are left to decide alone, we tend to suffer, rather than benefit, from their expertise. Of course, if dialogue *really* flourishes, we do not in any ordinary sense have a hierarchy, do we? So this *is* a hard doctrine for those who utilize position for power rather than service.

(iv) Reconsideration of Dewey, Peters, Krishnamurti and Bremer

The challenge of Dewey, Peters, Krishnamurti and Bremer concerning the dangers of educational ideals can now be better understood. A close study of their writings reveals that they are not calling for the rejection of aims, but for a more careful handling of them. Dewey insists that since the student can only 'learn' under the motivation of purposes which *he* finds intelligible, the educator's aims for him may be suggested, with the possibility of rejection, but not imposed. Not that he would reject the search for truth; that is impossible. In one form or another, to be is to be in search of truth. But he might need to reject

as presently meaningless to himself the *form* of the search which the teacher at a specific time and place envisages for him. Of course, the same applies in the relation between teachers and administration. Impose an aim on a teacher which that teacher cannot accept through disagreement or misunderstanding, and the best that teacher can do is follow the rules mechanically. There is no hope of vital education there. And so on, again up the hierarchy. The efficiency of blind obedience is the death of education.

In a similar vein, Peters insists that people are not clay to be moulded. We must not fashion students in the image of highly specific ideals - such as 'being a doctor or lathe operator', or 'being a good citizen with such-and-such qualities'. Here the advantages of a certain type of vagueness in our aims are apparent.

Krishnamurti emphasizes the importance of the sensitivity of the educator to each student as *individual*, to his *unique* capacities and directions. If we impose a highly specific ideal on him we cease to see him in his present uniqueness. We thus condition rather than educate him. It is a very similar position to that of Peters.

Bremer acknowledges that for a rational determination of direction we must work with explicit ideals, but we must be ready to modify them or the path to their realization as circumstances change and our understanding grows. To do otherwise is to submit to the temptations of indoctrination, oppression, dogmatism, fanaticism and unintelligent habit. All of which are anti-educational.

However, let us go slowly here with Bremer. There is a ditch on the other side of the road also. This flexibility in the handling of ideals has limits. Remaining with our example of the search for truth as an indispensable aim of all education, we cannot, as I showed earlier,

compromise *it* in the face of changed and difficult circumstances. Now I emphasize this in connection with the familiar phenomenon we encounter at all levels of education as 'the *loss* of our ideals'. If you relinquish an *indispensable* educational aim under the difficulty of achieving it, you literally cease to educate. You may go through the motions, but education will occur thenceforth only by chance. If the ideal is established as true and indispensable for education, the only things you can change are your interpretations of the meaning of it, and the length and type of path for its realization. The failure to be clear on this point I would judge exerts a devastating toll on the effectiveness of our schools.

(v) Impossibility of Attainment as the Strength of Ideals

I mentioned the problem of the apparent impossibility of attainment of highly general ideals. When have you attained the important truths? When have you reached your 'full potential'? The obvious answer is: never. And that is not false. It is also not entirely true. For these ideals do not have their importance by being *reached*. They are not terminations. They are abstractions which *continuously* affect the evolving 'shape' of concrete life.

This characteristic of not being attainable is precisely the strength of high ideals for in it lies the possibility of their unique function--to continuously and universally direct and evaluate. Consider a project an educator has initiated. The aim at the project is terminating. When the project is completed, the aim has no more use. But the utility of another aim continues - the aim which designated the *educational* purpose of the project. It continues after the completion of the project precisely because the project can only be judged an *educational*

success or failure by reference to it. And then it will give birth in the imagination to the next, different, project. The idea of the activity as an *educational* project neither arises from itself or nothing; nor does it justify itself.

Of course, an ideal may be unattained for the wrong reasons. It may *be* a terminating aim, but conceived out of ignorance or neglect of opposing circumstances. That is when an ideal is *truly* 'unrealistic'. The attempt to teach a plethora of subjects, each to equal and significant depth, is just such an unrealistic approach to goal-setting. The most glaring example of this form of unrealism that I have noted recently is in the Alberta 'Harder' Report. The report, addressing itself to the future needs of one of the most rapidly and widely changing societal groups in Canada, depicts its overall educational ideal in a long quotation from Isocrates, which, so far as I can see, is beautifully suited to the aristocracy of a *static* society. It says nothing of the capacities relevant to dealing intelligently with bewildering change, unless politeness and a stiff upper lip are the virtues our melting pot of a province needs to solve its problems.

(vi) Aims Designating the Unique Purpose of Schooling

The "Harder" Report is on stronger ground when it calls for a more careful specification of the aim of schools as opposed to the aims of education in general, incidental or otherwise. If we take an ideal like the nurturing of the search for truth - so general it applies to any process whatever which is educative in some way - it is clear that it should apply to any social institution whatsoever, since social life is not possible without it. Is it therefore not an aim which uniquely designates

schooling, or is it that the school should function in some special way with regard to it?

Since I cannot imagine an educational institution which regards the attainment of important truths as a merely incidental achievement of its processes, I opt for the latter. It seems to me that the unique aim of schooling arises from the fact that our capacity to discern important truths is too crucial to be left to chance and sporadic instruction. The school should be unique because in it there are educators with an unusual understanding of the dynamics of personal inquiry, the conditions essential to nurturing it, and a more than ordinary grasp of the areas of life in which it will need to be exercised with special subtlety in the future. This kind of professional ability is not presently, for the most part, characteristic of teachers to a high degree, partly because their own schooling militated against it, partly because teacher-education institutions do not value it highly. What we value most highly seems to be the attempt to transmit knowledge. The problem with that, of course, is its impossibility. And I should add that what I have suggested here is not at all what the Harder Report settles upon. If it is implemented, it will undoubtedly militate *against* the growth of the capacity I have in mind.

(vii) What Looks Absurd May Not Be So

I referred earlier to those high ideals which immediately strike one as absurd. My example was Leonard's proposal of the nurturing of ecstasy. However, I don't think we can any more afford to be too quickly deterred from critical attention by immediate impressions of absurdity than by those of obviousness. Even less so, for changing conditions mean that emphasis on important ideals also change, if relevance is maintained.

And anything really new has a ring of absurdity to it. What we should be *most* suspicious of is that which sounds too familiar!

I cannot go into detail, but there are several points to note which render Leonard's suggestion considerably more acceptable to me. Firstly, although many forms of ecstasy are attainable by most people, from artistic endeavour to rhythmic movement, from a flash of understanding to Kundalini meditation, our culture has been distinguished by its suppression, devaluation, or class limitation of too many of them, and by its encouragement of some of the least valuable, such as alcoholic inebriation. We have scarcely begun to explore our capacities for enjoyment. This is at the very least curious, is it not? What kind of attitude to life is it which turns its back upon and leaves to chance our rich resources for enjoyment? There are healthy signs of intolerance of this grim disposition, some of them slightly permeating our schools. I say 'healthy', since I agree with Alfred North Whitehead that all of life is for enjoyment, indeed that *life* is enjoyment. If this is true, then it would be badly mistaken for educators to *oppose* such an ideal, even if it were not designated as central. It could be that Leonard is giving us a timely warning to encourage, through schooling, the hesitant beginnings of a movement away from a life-denying cultural imbalance.

Since genius, by definition, is always ahead of understanding of the times, I propose that we exercise great tolerance for our absurdities and eccentrics , and make sure that we don't crucify our messiahs.

(viii) Ideals: From Toil to Play

While on the subject of enjoyment, let us not forget what may be the most important of all functions of high ideals - their capacity to

transform toil into play, and to energize purpose with long perseverance. Anyone who has sampled the exhaustions and frustrations of teaching, for example, will not easily ignore this point.

E. Conclusion

The blindly practical are those who make practical decisions without serious consideration of high ideals. The impractically ideal are those who fanatically or sentimentally embrace their ideals without in fact gaining any significant illumination of specific practice from them. I have advocated a third way which could most appropriately be termed that of the ideally practical. Like all really good things it is an orientation whose achievement is difficult, and, also, as with all really good things, the difficulty is worthwhile. It is less like toil, and more like play.

To return briefly to the original paradox, let me say immediately that the standpoint of ideal practicality is not proposed as a fairy tale panacea for all ills. However, it seems to me to be the most intelligent approach. The paradox arises, to reiterate, out of the need to think more deeply and broadly than ever in less time than ever, in the face of an unprecedented rapidity in the occurrence of problems. The tendency is to be impaled on one or another horn of the dilemma - to lapse either into thoughtless action or actionless thought. This is clearly an oversimplification, since both admit of degrees. My perception is that a third alternative utilized where adequate funds and suitable expertise allow is the appeal to a wide selection of empirical knowledge, but without significant consideration of knowledge related to high ideals. There is thus a great gathering of data for mere 'patchwork' or 'stop-gap' policies. As such, they are of short duration, and a frequent repetition of the process is required. But the repetition, being of the same kind is equally ineffective. The dilemma has not been escaped. Leaving out the economic dimension, we are impaled on the problem of time, *and* on that of adequate

knowledge, since the appeal was to breadth and not depth. If there is to be the best use of time, and appeal to *appropriate* knowledge, three components seem to be required in policy making:

(a) There must be a critical examination of high ideals involved or possibly relevant, in the spirit of 'ideal practicality'. This provides for knowledge *in depth*, and ensures that changes will be far-reaching and of long duration, since they relate to our *deepest* concerns, and *most urgent* problems.

(b) There must be a collaboration of people in various empirical fields, to get the required breadth of knowledge in the shortest time.

(c) The policy-making process must include recipients of expected changes, or their chosen representatives, to correctly ascertain needs and thereby offset the possibility of a rapid renewal of the demand for more policy change.

My impression is that some of our major recent educational reports - Faure, Hall-Dennis, Worth, and Plowden, at least - have given a fine example of the spirit and method of this approach to policy-making. They unashamedly work in a framework of explicit high ideals, and flesh out their thought with a solid appeal to relevant facts, and a thorough detailing of implied programs.

It occurs to me that this approach I am terming 'ideal practicality' is, after all, only a reaffirmation of what I presume *civilization* really *is* - the invocation of high ideals in shaping life, in a framework of shared perspectives and co-operative decision-making.

POSTSCRIPT

If this orientation is taken seriously, and the difficulties tackled squarely, I would expect to see some interesting changes. Among them would be the following:

(a) Pedagogical change in education will take place from the level of the individual teacher *upwards*. The *art* of educating can only be conducted in response to a personal vision of relevant ideals, not in response to an imposed methodology.

(b) Educational philosophers will forsake the safety of their psuedo-linguistic activity of 'clarifying educational language usage', and undertake the rational exploration of high ideals in their detailed contribution to civilized experience. They will do this *in the midst of* a continuous dialogue with educational practioners and a continuous participation in policy-making at all levels. After all, the skills of the philosopher *are* required for crucial parts of the enquiry into and application of high ideals.

(c) *All*, rather than, I would guess, ten per cent, of teachers-in-preparation will be expected to immerse themselves in a multi-dimensional study of pervasive and novel ideals affecting educational decision.

(d) Alternative schools will be *actively encouraged* (rather than *tolerated*) as our most important pedagogical research centres, supplying vital data on the effects of implementing different ideals, and on the effectiveness of a variety of methodologies for the realization of commonly-held ideals.

(e) Research educational psychologists will begin to study and document the effects of ideals, entertained in the various modes, on the quality of experience and the character of action over long periods under a variety of conditions.

Even these changes, for the moment, would be practically ideal.

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AN EDUCATION POLICY-MAKER'S PARADOX

1. THE CONTEMPORY SITUATION EXHIBITS UNPRECEDENTED RAPIDITY, DIVERSITY, AND NOVELTY OF CHANGE

THUS, REQUIRED OF POLICY-MAKERS IS

2. SPEED OF DECISION TO COMBAT RAPIDITY OF CHANGE

3. INCREASED KNOWLEDGE TO DEAL WITH DIVERSITY AND NOVELTY OF CHANGES

4. SPEED OF DECISION DIMINISHES THINKING AND DATA-COLLECTION TIME

5. INCREASED KNOWLEDGE REQUIRES INCREASED THINKING AND DATA-COLLECTION TIME

CONTRADICTION:
PARALYSIS OF INTELLIGENT ACTION

THOUGHTLESS ACTION → 'BLINDLY PRACTICAL'

!/?

ACTIONLESS THOUGHT → 'IMPRACTICALLY IDEAL'

MISTAKEN RESPONSES TO THE PARADOX

PARADOX:
THINK MORE CAREFULLY
ACT MORE QUICKLY

'PRACTICALITY' 1

GIVE UP! LEAVE IT TO THE EXPERTS

ASSUMPTION:

THE EXPERT KNOWS HOW BEST TO APPY HIS KNOWLEDGE

'PRACTICALITY' 2

DO WHAT COMES NATURALLY (READ: 'HABITUALLY')

ASSUMPTION:

WHAT IS FAMILIAR IS SAFE AND GOOD

'PRACTICALITY' 3

GO AHEAD ON YOUR OWN — MAKE CREATIVE DECISIONS AS WELL AS YOU CAN

ASSUMPTION:

THE WORLD IS SO SIMPLE AND INNOCENT THAT ONE EXPERIENCED PERSON CAN, WITH CARE, HAVE ALL THE KNOWLEDGE, INITIATIVE AND GOODWILL NECESSARY

QUESTION: IS THERE A WAY OUT TO ENLIGHTENED PRACTICALITY?

THE ESSENCE OF BLIND PRACTICALITY

QUESTION:

WHAT MAKES ALL FORMS OF BLIND PRACTICALITY BLIND? (THAT IS, IGNORANT OF THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM, AND THEREFORE, INEFFECTIVE)

↓

ANSWER:

THE ASSUMPTION THAT 1) A SPECIAL CONSIDERATION OF HIGH IDEALS CAN OR MUST BE DISPENSED WITH, AND 2) IDEALS DO NOT SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT THE COURSE OF ACTION, AND ACTION IS WHAT IS IMPORTANT

—||—

THE ESSENCE OF IMPRACTICAL IDEALISM

QUESTION:

WHAT MAKES ALL FORMS OF IMPRACTICAL IDEALISM IMPRACTICAL?

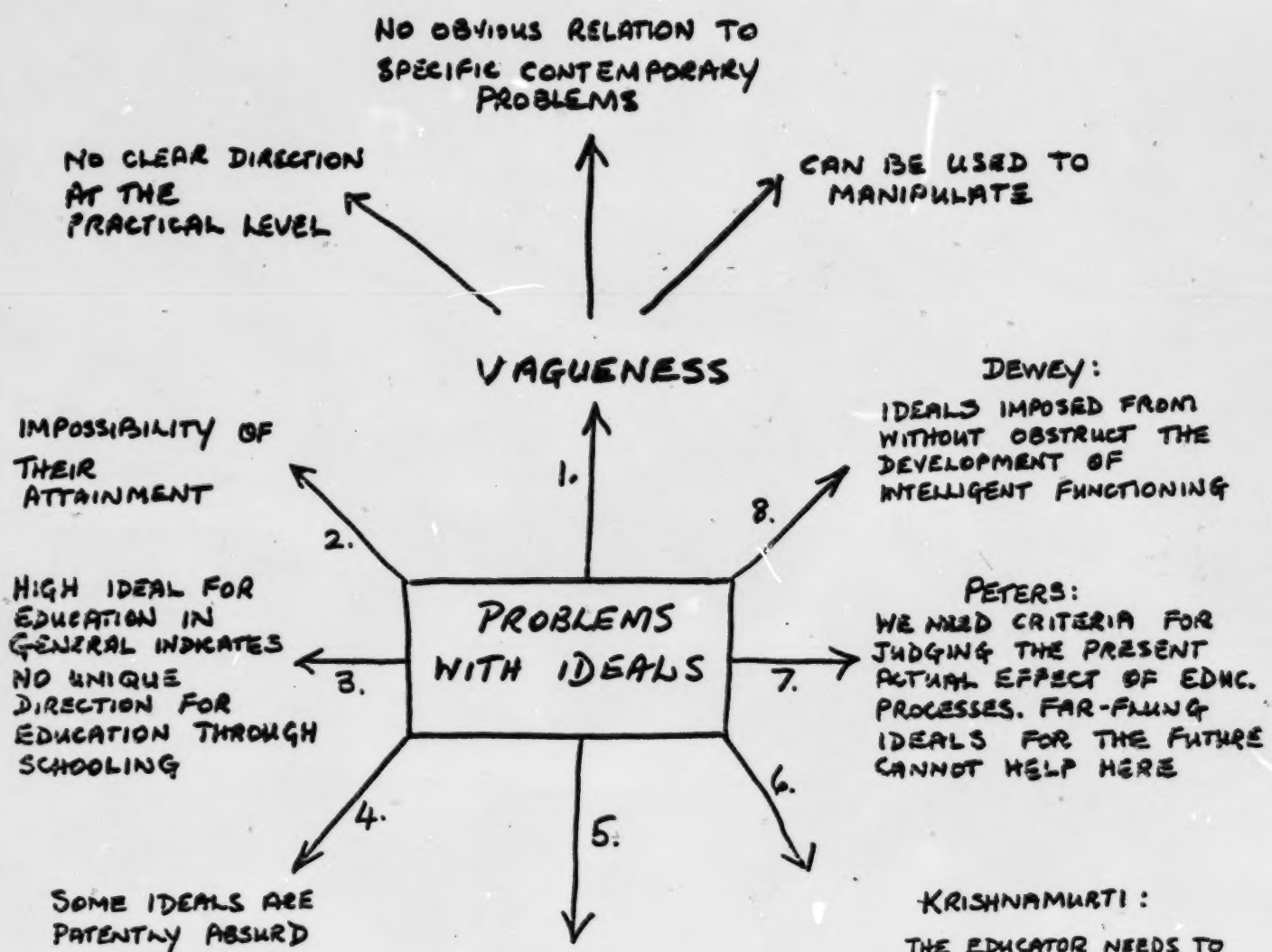
↓

ANSWER:

EITHER, 1) THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE TRANSLATION OF IDEALS INTO THE RIGHT PRACTICE FOR THEIR REALIZATION IS OBVIOUS AND INEVITABLE,

OR, 2) THE ASSUMPTION THAT IDEALS DON'T SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT THE COURSE OF ACTION, AND CONTEMPLATION OF HIGH IDEALS IS WHAT IS IMPORTANT

WHY DO 'PRACTICAL' PEOPLE DISLIKE HIGH IDEALS?


NO OBVIOUS RELATION TO SPECIFIC CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS
NO CLEAR DIRECTION AT THE PRACTICAL LEVEL
CAN BE USED TO MANIPULATE
VAGUENESS
PROBLEMS WITH IDEALS
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
IMPOSSIBILITY OF THEIR ATTAINMENT
HIGH IDEAL FOR EDUCATION IN GENERAL INDICATES NO UNIQUE DIRECTION FOR EDUCATION THROUGH SCHOOLING
SOME IDEALS ARE PATENTLY ABSURD E.G. 'ECSTASY'
DEWEY:
IDEALS IMPOSED FROM WITHOUT OBSTRUCT THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTELLIGENT FUNCTIONING
PETERS:
WE NEED CRITERIA FOR JUDGING THE PRESENT ACTUAL EFFECT OF EDUC. PROCESSES. FAR-FLUNG IDEALS FOR THE FUTURE CANNOT HELP HERE
KRISHNAMURTI:
THE EDUCATOR NEEDS TO KNOW A PERSON AS HE IS, NOT AS HE LOOKS IN TERMS OF SOME IMPOSED IDEAL
BREMER:
TWO FORMS OF EDUCATIONAL RATIONALITY
a) SET FUTURE GOAL AND PROCEED UNDIVERTED
b) SET FUTURE GOAL BUT MODIFY AS YOU GO

b. IS THE CORRECT FORM, BUT STRONG ATTACHMENT TO IDEALS DRAWS US INTO a.

IMPOSSIBILITY OF AVOIDING IDEALS

1. IDEALS ARE INVOLVED IN ALL ACTION AS THE BASIS OF ITS PURPOSEFULNESS

↓ THEREFORE

2. IDEALS CANNOT BE ERADICATED FROM DECISION-MAKING

↓ QUESTION:

WHAT THEN IS HAPPENING WHEN PEOPLE CLAIM TO HAVE REJECTED IDEALISM ?

↓ ANSWER:

3. THEY ARE MISTAKEN. THEY HAVE ONLY REJECTED THOUGHT ABOUT IDEALS

↓ QUESTION:

HOW ARE IDEALS STILL INVOLVED IN THEIR DECISIONS ?

↓ ANSWER:

4. AS SUBCONSCIOUS MOTIVATION CONCEPTS AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

↓ PROBLEM:

AS SUBCONSCIOUS, IDEALS REMAIN UNCRITICIZED. IF FALSE OR BADLY MISUNDERSTOOD, THEY MUDDLE AND MISDIRECT ACTION

5. AS IMPLIED IN THE ACTUAL EFFECTS OF THEIR ACTIONS

↓ PROBLEM:

LACK OF CONSCIOUS CONSIDERATION OF IDEALS

↓ HABITUAL ACTION

↓ BLINDNESS TO ACTUAL RESULTS

↓ FAILURE TO SEE RESULTS AS OTHER THAN THOSE INTENDED

C. 6a
C. 6a

CAN A LIMITED AIM AT A MEASURABLE ACHIEVEMENT (E.G. TO TEACH THE "BASICS") AVOID HIGH IDEALS ?

AIM:
TEACH "BASIC KNOWLEDGE

↓

PROBLEM: VAGUENESS

↓

E.G. WHAT IS "BASIC" KNOWLEDGE ? BASIC TO WHAT ? LIFE ?

↓

WHAT KNOWLEDGE IS BASIC TO LIFE ?

↓

3 R's ? NO !

↙ ↓ ↘

SPEECH ? BETTER

ETHICAL SENSITIVITY — FOR QUALITY OF COMMUNITY, CONTROL OF USE OF OTHER KNOWLEDGE ? AT LEAST.

↓

WHAT ARE 3 R's GOOD FOR ?

↓

WITHOUT SPEECH, NOTHING. WITH SPEECH — COMMUNICATION

↓

COMMUNICATION IS ESSENTIAL TO LIFE. BETTER COMMUNICATION, BETTER LIFE

AIM OF EDUCATION IS TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE

↓

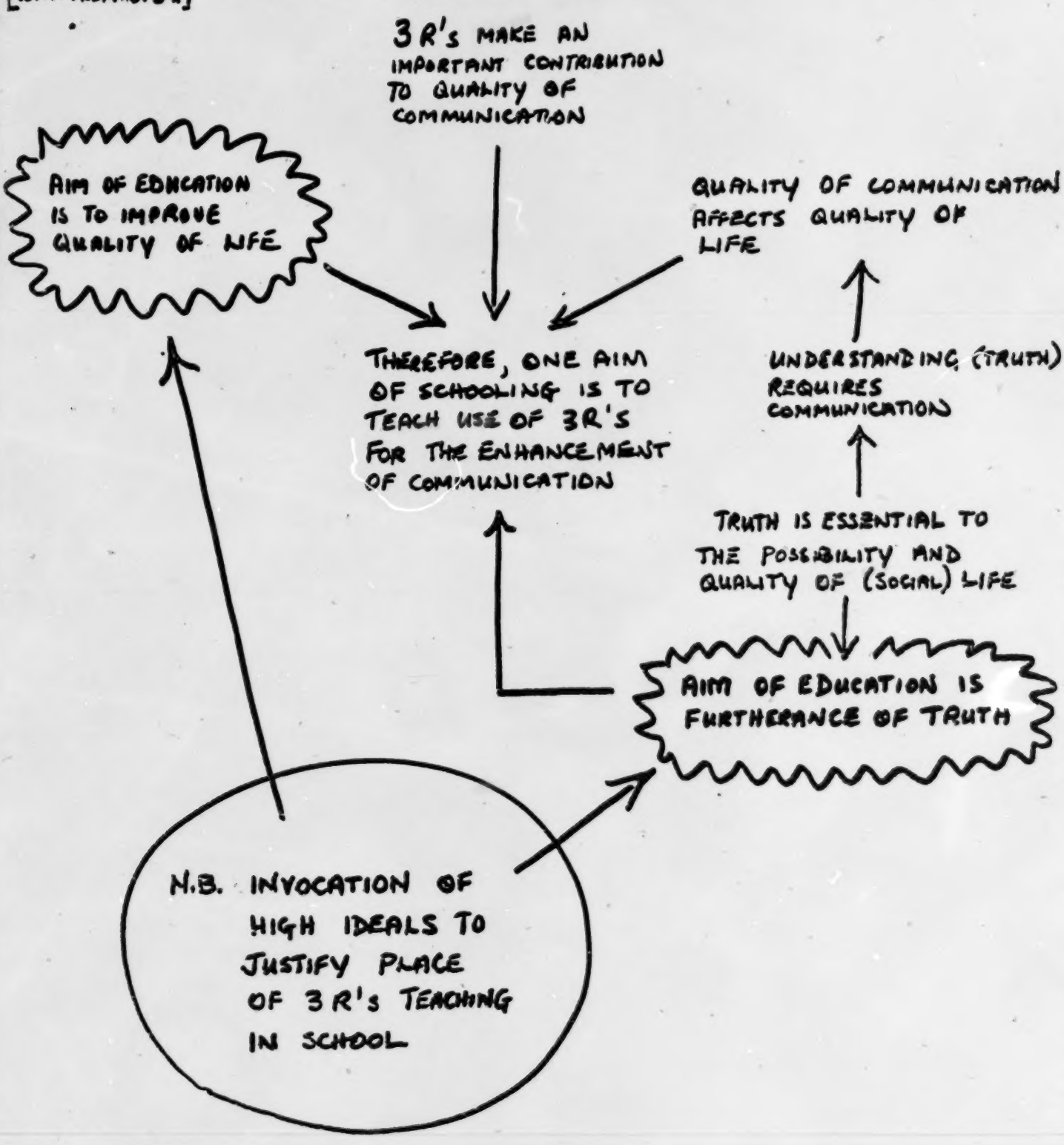
EDUCATION REQUIRES GROWTH OF COMMUNICATION ABILITY

↓

AIM OF SCHOOLING IS AT LEAST TO CONTRIBUTE TO THIS BY ENCOURAGING BEST POSSIBLE COMMUNICATION ABILITY THROUGH CONTACT WITH THOSE SPECIALLY TRAINED FOR THIS. HENCE: 3 R's.

DOES THE AIM AT TEACHING THE "BASICS" (I.E. 3 R's) INVOLVE APPEAL TO HIGH IDEALS?

[CONT. FROM C.6a]


3 R's MAKE AN IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION TO QUALITY OF COMMUNICATION
AIM OF EDUCATION IS TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE
QUALITY OF COMMUNICATION AFFECTS QUALITY OF LIFE
THEREFORE, ONE AIM OF SCHOOLING IS TO TEACH USE OF 3R'S FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF COMMUNICATION
UNDERSTANDING (TRUTH) REQUIRES COMMUNICATION
TRUTH IS ESSENTIAL TO THE POSSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF (SOCIAL) LIFE
AIM OF EDUCATION IS FURTHERANCE OF TRUTH
N.B. INVOCATION OF HIGH IDEALS TO JUSTIFY PLACE OF 3 R's TEACHING IN SCHOOL

THE REINSTATEMENT OF THE EFFICACY OF IDEALS FOR PRACTICE

HIGH IDEALS: CAN THE PROBLEMS OF THEIR RELATION TO ACTION BE OVERCOME?

1. IDEALS CAN GIVE CLEAR DIRECTION AT THE LEVEL OF PRACTICE, IN CONJUNCTION WITH CORRECT AUXILIARY PRINCIPLES E.G. AS INVOLVED IN LEARNING THEORY. THIS REQUIRES COLLABORATION WITH EXPERTS IN THE FIELDS RELATED TO THE AUXILIARY PRINCIPLES, AND THUS A TEAM APPROACH TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF IDEALS. THIS IS A 'DIALOGIC' APPROACH TO POLICY-MAKING, OPPOSED TO THE MONOPOLY OF DECISION-MAKING BY EXPERTS.

2. MANIPULATION CAN BE AVOIDED, BY A DEMAND FOR EXPLANATION OF THE MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF STATED IDEALS, AND FOR THE REASONS WHY CERTAIN MODES OF IMPLEMENTATION ARE CHOSEN RATHER THAN OTHERS. THIS REQUIRES A 'DIALOGIC' APPROACH TO POLICY FORMATION, AND THE ABOLITION OF POWER HIERARCHIES IN EDUCATION.

3. THE AMBIGUITY IS NOT HOPELESS; THE MEANING, HOWEVER VAGUE, DOES EXCLUDE UNWANTED ALTERNATIVES. SOME VAGUENESS BECOMES A STRENGTH IN OFFSETTING THE RESTRICTIVENESS OF OVERSPECIFIC AIMS.

8. DEWEY, PETERS, KRISHNAMURTI AND BREMER DO NOT WISH TO EXCLUDE HIGH IDEALS, BUT TO WARN AGAINST THEIR MISUSE.

4. THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF ATTAINMENT OF HIGH IDEALS IS THEIR ADVANTAGE: THROUGH IT THEY GIVE CONTINUING DIRECTION AND THE POSSIBILITY OF CONTINUING IMPROVEMENT. HIGH IDEAL ARE NOT THE SORT OF THING TO BE REACHED — THEY 'SHAPE' WHATEVER IS REACHED.

5. THEY CAN SUPPLY UNIQUE DIRECTION FOR SCHOOLING: IT CAN ADOPT THE ROLE OF AN AGENCY WITH A SPECIAL EFFICIENCY IN THE REALIZATION OF SOME ASPECT OF THE IDEAL, OUT OF RECOGNITION THAT THE IDEAL IS TOO IMPORTANT FOR ITS REALIZATION TO BE LEFT TO CHANCE.

6. APPARENT ABSURDITY OF SOME IDEALS MAY BE MISLEADING — EMPHASIS ON THE IDEAL OF ECSTASY IMPLIES A LIFE-DENYING CULTURAL IMBALANCE.

7. THE ENTERTAINMENT OF HIGH IDEALS ENERGIZES EXPERIENCE AND DEEPENS MEANING, SO GIVING PERSEVERENCE, AND THE SENSE OF PLAY RATHER THAN TOIL.

A NEW CONCEPT FOR THE APPROACH TO EDUCATIONAL DECISION-MAKING — 'IDEAL PRACTICALITY'

'IDEAL PRACTICALITY'

IDEALS ARE INVOKED, WITH A CLEAR INDICATION OF IMPORTANCE TO THE QUALITY OF LIFE, AND OF MODE OF ENTRY INTO THE AIMS OF SCHOOLING

+

A DEMONSTRATION OF LOGICAL CONNECTIONS TO ADEQUATELY SPECIFIED MODES OF IMPLEMENTATION, SHOWING WHY THOSE MODES SEEM MORE APPROPRIATE THAN OTHERS

+

EVIDENCE THAT THOSE MODES DO IN FACT REALIZE THE STATED AIMS, OR, PLANS FOR THE COLLECTION OF SUCH EVIDENCE FROM THE PRACTICE

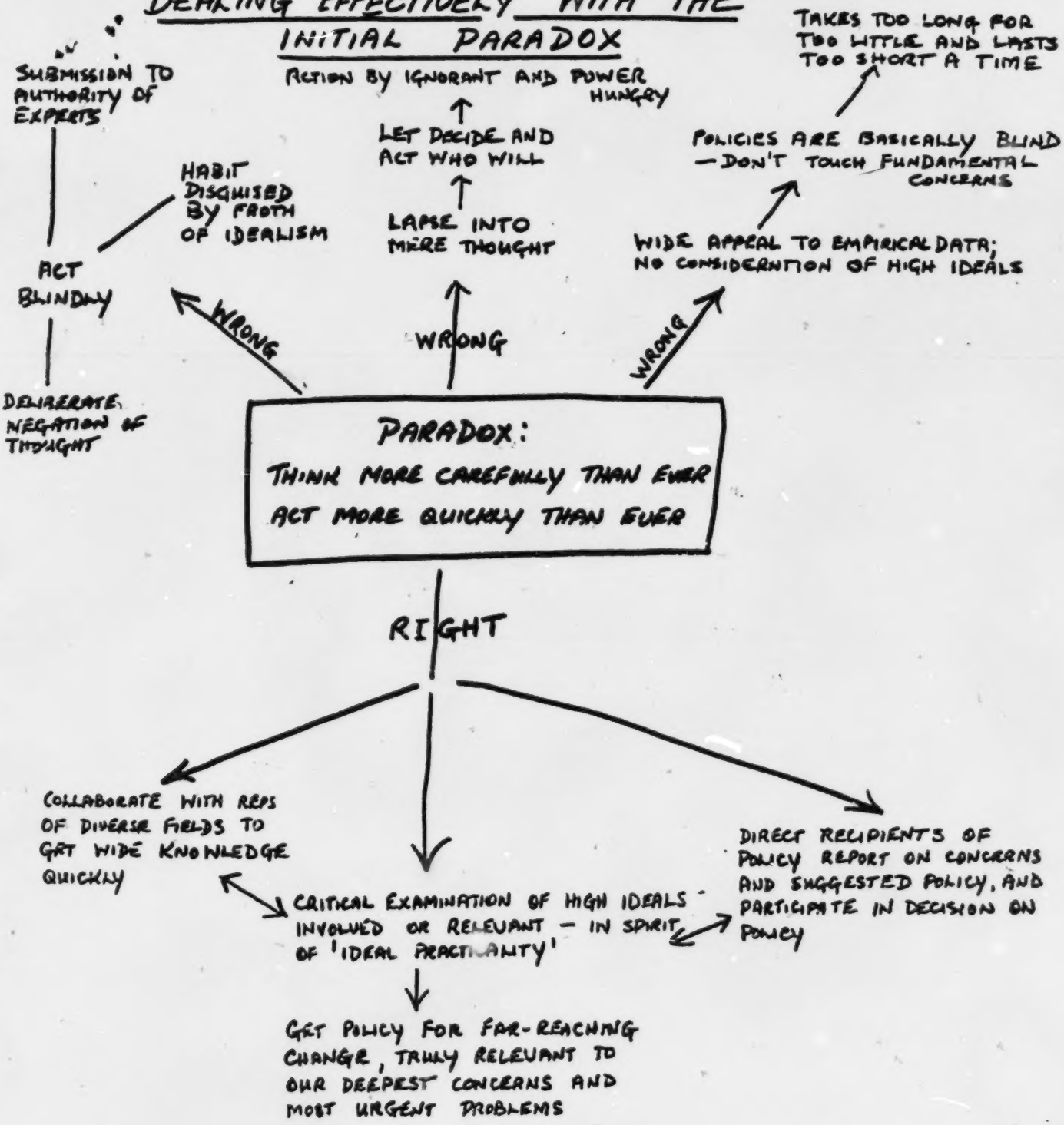
'BLIND PRACTICALITY'

DECISIONS MADE WITHOUT CONSIDERATION OF RELEVANT IDEALS

'IMPRACTICAL IDEALISM'

ATTACHMENT TO HIGH IDEALS IS SENTIMENTAL OR ESOTERIC OR MANIPULATIVE; NO INDICATION THAT PRACTICES ESPOUSED BEAR ANY STAMP OF THE IDEALS STATED

DEALING EFFECTIVELY WITH THE INITIAL PARADOX


SUBMISSION TO AUTHORITY OF EXPERTS
ACTION BY IGNORANT AND POWER HUNGRY
TAKES TOO LONG FOR TOO LITTLE AND LASTS TOO SHORT A TIME
LET DECIDE AND ACT WHO WILL
POLICIES ARE BASICALLY BLIND — DON'T TOUCH FUNDAMENTAL CONCERNS
HABIT DISGUISED BY FROTH OF IDEALISM
LAPSE INTO MERE THOUGHT
WIDE APPEAL TO EMPIRICAL DATA; NO CONSIDERATION OF HIGH IDEALS
ACT BLINDLY
WRONG
WRONG
WRONG
DELIBERATE NEGATION OF THOUGHT
PARADOX:
THINK MORE CAREFULLY THAN EVER
ACT MORE QUICKLY THAN EVER
RIGHT
COLLABORATE WITH REPS OF DIVERSE FIELDS TO GET WIDE KNOWLEDGE QUICKLY
CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF HIGH IDEALS INVOLVED OR RELEVANT — IN SPIRIT OF 'IDEAL PRACTICALITY'
DIRECT RECIPIENTS OF POLICY REPORT ON CONCERNS AND SUGGESTED POLICY, AND PARTICIPATE IN DECISION ON POLICY
GET POLICY FOR FAR-REACHING CHANGE, TRULY RELEVANT TO OUR DEEPEST CONCERNS AND MOST URGENT PROBLEMS